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ABSTRACT

This summary evaluates a federal demonstration program to reach "disconnected" youth not currently served by job training programs under the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA). Disconnected youth are defined as those who have lost or never developed the traditional values of their communities, who do not participate in traditional social service programs, lack motivation to succeed, and consistently perform well below their potential. Disconnected youth are often dropouts, youth offenders, or teen parents, and are disproportionately represented among disadvantaged black youth. The model program, managed by the 70001 Training & Employment Institute, was implemented in Birmingham (Alabama) and Dallas (Texas) between January 1987 and June 1988. The following program features are outlined: (1) outreach and recruitment; (2) special assessment and intake; (3) individualized employability plans; (4) remedial education in basic skills; (5) motivational activities; and (6) employment training, placement, and follow-up. The following management features are emphasized: (1) dual supervisory structure divided between internal and external responsibilities; (2) volunteer advisory council comprised of community leaders; (3) small student to staff ratio (1 to 25); (4) ongoing staff training and technical assistance; and (5) commitments from local service providers. The demonstration exceeded its goals for enrollment and positive terminations and program costs were lower than those of JTPA. Suggestions for replication are included. Statistical data are included on three tables. (FMW)

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Executive Summary

BELIEVING ONCE AGAIN:

Solutions Addressing the Plight of Challenged Youth

A demonstration project addressing the needs of disconnected youth
Funded by the U.S. Department of Labor

September 1988

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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Practitioners have long insisted that current remedial education and job-readiness training programs do not reach those young people most in need. Despite legislative and regulatory mandates to serve the hard-to-reach, programs operating under the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) too often emphasize job placement over basic skills preparation, and too frequently overlook youth whose skill levels, employment histories, and family backgrounds put them at greatest risk for long-term unemployment.

These youngsters are often called "disconnected," a term which more accurately describes their feelings toward their community and an uncertain future than it describes any personal quality. Disconnected youth do not participate in traditional social service programs, lack motivation to succeed, and consistently perform well below their potential. These are young people who have lost or never developed confidence in traditional community institutions or values. They are often dropouts, youth offenders, or teen parents; they cut across all economic strata but are disproportionately represented among disadvantaged black youth. They have very low levels of academic skill, and have often failed at one or more previous recovery programs. In short, they are disconnected from the mainstream of their communities, their ambition diminished, their hopes dimmed.

Purpose of The Demonstration Project

Concerned about the plight of these youth, the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) funded a demonstration project in partnership with 70001 Training & Employment Institute to determine whether a thoughtful, creative, and innovative model might succeed where other program efforts have failed. DOL sought to develop and test a model program which could be replicated nationally. Unlike the strict income and employment guidelines under JTPA, the demonstration would permit any youth aged 16-21 to enroll provided he or she lived in the greater metropolitan area of the demonstration sites, and could demonstrate that he or she was experiencing disconnection from mainstream functions:

- A high school dropout
- Unemployed
- Uninvolved in other training or service program

70001 was selected to demonstrate the model because of the organization's long history of providing high quality services to young people. From January 1, 1987 to June 30, 1988, 70001 managed two demonstration sites, one in Birmingham, Alabama, and the other in Dallas, Texas. 70001 and DOL selected these two communities because they had high dropout rates, high unemployment figures, and demonstrated the potential for community support.

Issues and Goals

The demonstration sought answers to the following questions:

- Are there youngsters who do not participate in JTPA-type programs but require similar education and employment services?
- What are their characteristics, special needs, and barriers to self-sufficiency?
- How can youth who may actively avoid training and education programs be recruited and retained?
- What program features are important to their future labor market success?
- Finally and most important, can a short-term training program help disconnected youth re-establish linkages with work, education, and community life?

In addition, the demonstration sought to accomplish specific training and placement goals -- an ambitious undertaking given the experimental nature of the program model and target population. Specifically, the project sought the following outcomes:

- Enroll 540 youth (270 youth per site)
- Positively terminate 460 youth (85% of those enrolled), where positive termination meant:
  - Job Placement
  - Military enlistment
  - School, occupational training or college enrollment
  - GED completion, or
  - Employment competency attainment.
- Place 376 youth (70% of those enrolled) in private, unsubsidized employment

Job placement was a performance indicator although DOL recognized that placement alone could not be the sole determinant of success in a program targeted at youth with severely limited prospects for employment.

The demonstration confirmed that large numbers of youth who exhibit various forms of disconnection existed in Birmingham and Dallas.

Participants differed markedly from those found in more traditional JTPA youth programs. Participants in the demonstration were younger, more likely to be male, more frequently minority, and more severely underskilled than participants in traditional JTPA or 70001 programs (see Figure 1.a & 1.b).

Some youth were not JTPA-eligible, despite their need for training. One such typical participant might have been expelled from high school for repeated truancy or violence, be on probation, have an income below JTPA guidelines, and yet be prevented from enrolling in other JTPA programs due to program entry requirements which demand eighth grade competency. In another case, a young girl might have dropped out because of an unwanted pregnancy, test within JTPA academic guidelines, yet be denied JTPA training because of a family income which exceeded statutory guidelines.

The demonstration was particularly successful in recruiting and enrolling black males (see Figure 2). This population is known to be difficult to reach and difficult to serve, and yet nearly 50% of all participants were black males. Nearly 100% were economically disadvantaged; 94% were high school dropouts, 84% tested below the eighth grade level; and some 18% were youth offenders. Given the severe demographic pressures and educational failures which may reduce job participation among black males in the coming decades, the success with this population is particularly gratifying.

In short, the demonstration projects served young people unserved by other programs in the community, and in particular those who confronted very serious barriers to employment.

Disconnected Youth Demonstration
Participant Profile (Figure 1.a & 1.b)

			DEMONSTRATION		
	JTPA[1]	70001[2]	DALLAS	BIRM.	TOTAL
SEX					
Male	55%	47%	66%	63%	64%
Female	45%	53%	34%	36%	36%
RACE					
Black	34%	41%	62%	96%	75%
Hispanic	14%	8%	21%	—	13%
White	49%	51%	15%	4%	10%
Native Am.	2%	—	1%	—	1%
Asian	2%	—	—	—	1%
AGE					
16-18 yrs.	51%	59%	—	—	76%
19-21	48%	36%	—	—	23%

EDUCATION	DCY[3]	JTPA	70001
Dropout	96%	25%	88%
Student	—	1%	2%
H.S. Graduate	4%	49%	8%
ACADEMIC ASSESSMENT			
5th & under	25%	—	16%
6th	24%	—	15%
7th	19%	—	21%
8th	15%	—	16%
9th	8%	—	12%
10th +	10%	—	20%
LABOR MARKET STATUS			
Never been employed	47%	—	26%
Unemployed	44%	32%	63%
Underemployed	9%	—	6%

[1] Source: JTPA figures from Job Training Quarterly Survey #6 for Program Year 1986.
[2] Source: 70001 network management information system.
[3] Disconnected Youth Demonstration Project

Disconnected Youth Demonstration
Profile of Young, Black Male Participants
(Figure 2)

	# OF BLACK MALES	% OF TOTAL
Enrollments	286	(49% of total enrollments)
Positive Terminations	81	32%
Placements	83	33%
AGE		
Under 16	68	24%
17	92	32%
18	57	20%
19	28	10%
Over 19	41	14%
EDUCATION		
Dropout	269	94%
H.S. Graduate	16	6%
GED	1	*
READING/MATH LEVELS (by grade level)		
5th	79	32%
6th-7th	108	38%
8th-9th	77	16%
10th +	16	6%

* less than one percent

Results

The demonstration exceeded 70001's most optimistic expectations (see Figure 3). The demonstration sites enrolled 588 youth, exceeding the original goal of 540. The projects positively terminated 484 youth (100% of the original goal) and helped 227 participants (60% of the original goal) to find employment. Dallas had significantly greater success than Birmingham in all respects, exceeding the DOL goals in every area except job placement. One should consider that DOL National Standards for FY 88-89 require only a 45% success rate in job placement and only a 75% positive termination rate in order to put these figures into proper perspective.

Equally significant is the demonstration's success with black male teens. Despite tremendous disadvantage at entry, some 64% of the black teenaged men terminated positively -- 32% entered employment, 29% entered advanced training programs.

The reactions of actual participants echoed these successes. According to the third party evaluator engaged to assess the demonstration, participants viewed the program as teaching strength of character, responsibility, and perseverance rather than merely providing job placement. The individualized and self-paced educational component was also widely praised, helping young people feel "responsible for my future (where) you see results for your work." Participants repeatedly praised program staff for their personal commitment and compassion.

The cost effectiveness of the demonstration sites was evident. The cost per positive termination was only $2,128, compared to the DOL youth performance standard of $4,900 per positive termination, or the FY '86 JTPA average cost per positive termination of $2,425.

Disconnected Youth Demonstration
Performance Results (Figure 3)

	GOALS[1]	DALLAS	BIRM.	TOTAL	% OF GOAL
Enrollments	540	354	234	588	109%
Positive Termination[2]	480	282	202	484	105%
Placements	376	158	69	227	60%

[1] Combined goals for total project: 270 enrollments, 230 positive terminations (85% of enrollments), and 188 placements (70% of enrollments) per site.

[2] The term "positive termination" is used to describe those who have met one or more of the following criteria: job placement, military enlistment, school, occupational training or college enrollment, GED completion or employment competency attainment.

Program Features

The model included many features which contributed to its success.

Outreach and recruitment was accomplished directly, through word of mouth referrals by staff and participants. Since the targeted population, by definition, did not typically seek assistance from the standard array of community services, direct recruitment was a necessity. With black males in particular, word of mouth recruitment was highly effective, generating 40% of all inquiries into the program by this sub-group. Staff supplemented direct methods with cross-referral arrangements with schools and community based organizations. The mass media, in particular radio outlets known to be popular among teens, was also used effectively since the target population was unlikely to read newspapers or community publications.

Special assessment and intake procedures were used to sustain the potential participant's interest and reduce fear and discouragement once a young person expressed an interest in enrolling. It is commonly understood that large numbers of potential JTPA enrollees are lost at intake due to the lengthy and complex JTPA certification procedures. In Dallas, the intake process was streamlined, involving group activities in informal settings. 85% of those youth who approached the Dallas program enrolled, compared to a 50% figure for traditional 70001 programs. Birmingham designed its intake process to align more closely with that of the local Service Delivery Area (SDA), where youth underwent testing and assessment prior to involvement in group activities. Nevertheless, Birmingham posted an impressive 75% enrollment figure.

Once enrolled, staff and participants completed an individualized employability plan which was used to help plan, monitor, and document progress through the program. The employability development plans were part of a tracking system called training coordination, and they resulted in more specific diagnosis of barriers to employment for participants. The system documented not only training services to be delivered but also specific objectives which were established weekly by the trainee and program staff. As a result, the plans ensured accountability to funders, administrators, staff, and the participants themselves.

After the employability development plans had been completed, participants began a three-part training scheme, based on the dynamics proven successful with out-of-school dropouts in 70001's network of employment readiness programs. These components included: remedial education in basic skills, motivational activities, and employment training, placement, and follow-up.

For the remedial education component, the sites employed the Comprehensive Competencies Program (CCP), a computer-managed and computer-assisted instructional package developed by Remediation & Training Institute. Since the majority of trainees demonstrated skills below the 8th grade level (25% below the fifth grade level), a proven system for basic skills instruction was necessary. CCP's detailed diagnostic and prescriptive procedures helped staff and participants identify specific skill deficiencies and provided exercises to overcome them. Print, audio, and visual materials were supplemented by computer-assisted instructional software. The CCP succeeded in helping 58 participants successfully complete the GED examination.

Motivational activities incorporated the techniques employed in many membership organizations. This approach provided participants, who were by definition unaffiliated with formal groups, a positive membership organization where they could experience belonging, participation, cooperation, and leadership on their own terms. Activities included classes in life skills (communication, consumer awareness, health and safety, government and law, and community resources); recognition and reward systems; career information; leadership development activities; and civic, and social events. Participants especially favored the community service activities undertaken and the democratic approach taken to solving problems.

Employment services encompassed pre-employment training in job-finding, getting, and keeping skills, as well as placement assistance. Staff assessed participants for employment-readiness and incorporated specific deficiencies into the employability development plan. 70001's Job Readiness Curriculum was employed, with pretest scores for entering participants averaging only 52% and post-test scores averaging 88%.

Staff job developers found employers reluctant at first to interview program participants due to the sites' nonexistent track record in the community. Moreover, jobs in growth industries demanded prior work experience and skill levels far beyond the level of program participants. Consequently, the programs sought to provide job placement opportunities in niches unfilled by other service providers. In Dallas, staff placed participants into part-time jobs to give them controlled work experience while completing work on academic goals. Given the general reluctance of many participants to explore work options (probably due to fear of failure), part-time employment helped provide a necessary foothold in the labor markets. Overall, 46% of youth placed accepted positions in the food service industry; 22% in the retail or wholesale industry; and the remainder in a range of occupations primarily in the service arena.

Finally, staff tracked the progress of participants and employers for 90 days following placement. This feature was considered one of the program's greatest assets by employers surveyed. The practice kept employers involved and interested in placing participants, again and again. Sixty-nine percent (69%) of the participants placed on the job were located by program staff 90 days after placement, and of those 31% were still employed. Since the majority of participants were working for the first time, some job instability was expected. The length of stay in the program was 17 weeks on average, or nearly 25% longer than those in traditional JTPA-type programs.

In addition to these program components, the demonstration sites incorporated the following management features:

- A dual supervisory structure which divided internal and external responsibilities between a program manager and program director respectively.

- A volunteer advisory council comprised of community leaders concerned with youth, and charged with providing program oversight and public relations assistance. Unclear expectations and the lack of clear goals probably contributed to the weaknesses of the advisory councils in both communities.

- A small student to staff ratio (1 to 25). The smaller ratios were designed to help staff cope with the anticipated additional burdens associated with serving a more difficult population. Staff turnover, the result of uncertain future funding and lower than average salaries, diminished the impact of smaller student to staff ratios. Nevertheless, staff were widely praised by participants and community leaders for their commitment and ability, according to the third-party evaluator.

- Ongoing staff training and technical assistance. 70001 staff provided an average of 19 days of technical assistance to the sites. The complicated process of CCP set-up accounted for much of the technical assistance provided, but the sites required more assistance than expected in other areas, as well.

- Unspecified commitments from local providers, including the SDAs in the demonstration sites. While Birmingham and Dallas were selected because future JTPA funding seemed likely, these commitments were not secured beforehand. Coupled with the short demonstration period, funding uncertainty contributed to staff turnover and reduced morale.

The sites shared most of these features, but they were distinguished by their emphasis on service. Dallas, termed more "market-driven" by the third-party evaluator, operated in strict adherence to the idealized program model. Birmingham, termed "product-driven" by the evaluator, modified enrollment and training guidelines to meet local SDA requirements. In no discernible way did the modifications affect the quality of services to participants. Slight differences in performance between the sites could not be attributed to any significant difference in programming. The changes seemed merely to represent the adaptation of a demonstration program model to the program and service climate of a local community.

Recommendations For Replication

The project demonstrated convincingly that a short-term training program combining these program and management features can have positive impact on the employability of participants who do not or cannot participate in other training programs. On that basis alone, 70001 recommends replication.

Specifically, 70001 recommends the following:

- Eligibility guidelines must be kept as flexible as possible, based more on individual circumstance than arbitrary income levels.

- DOL policy guidance for communities interested in developing programs to meet unserved populations should be strengthened.

- Project performance and funding periods for demonstration projects should extend for two years.

- Government sponsors should insist upon local financial commitments, both during and following the demonstration period.

- Diverse funding sources, which permit greater flexibility in providing services to non-traditional populations, should be encouraged.

- Participant tracking and follow-up should continue for at least 12 to 24 months.

- Outreach and recruitment efforts should utilize direct contact with youth wherever possible while incorporating targeted media and public relations techniques that reach and appeal to youth audiences.

- Initial assessment and intake procedures must be friendly and non-threatening in order to ensure that prospective participants enroll. Extensive testing protocols typically employed in JTPA programs should be modified.

- Individualized Employment Plans should be completed and maintained for each participant as part of the comprehensive case management system incorporated for any program.

- Basic academic skills instruction should employ a variety of techniques and educational media, including computer-assisted instruction, which permit instruction to be individualized and self-paced.

- Critical thinking skills should be incorporated into job-readiness training to provide participants with workplace literacy skills.

- Motivational activities which involve systematic recognition and reward systems, coupled with community service and leadership training events, should be incorporated.

- Because of the young age of participants, family members should be involved.

In addition to these program recommendations, 70001 suggests that the following insights gleaned from the demonstration be incorporated into future replication efforts:

- Careful oversight, thoughtful planning, active troubleshooting and expert assistance by an external agent is essential for the successful start-up and continuation of a demonstration of this type.

- Increased staff/participant ratios, potentially difficult to maintain, more readily accommodate the special needs of this demanding population.

- Staff stability and continuity can be improved by hiring locally based staff, establishing competitive salary levels, and providing formalized training to each new staffer within 60 days of hiring.

- Volunteer advisory councils play an important role in program operations where goals and expectations have been clarified.

- Specific, concrete, and objective standards of operation governing program performance should be incorporated universally.

Caveat

70001 is gratified by the results of this demonstration. Many youth who evidenced alienation from the community and frustration with available services enrolled and participated freely in training. We were particularly encouraged by the participation of minority males and their success. Caution, however, should temper the urge to draw simple conclusions from the results.

Without question, the staff in Dallas and Birmingham proved that by getting out on the street, reaching out directly to youth, being sensitive to their fears and skepticism, and by conveying clear expectations and sharing control, disconnected youth not only will participate, but desperately want to. That these youth exist, can be reached, and have pervasive problems to overcome, are the clear lessons of the demonstration.

Furthermore, the program model points to the valuable program elements which ought to be infused in any program seeking to help youth who have stopped believing in themselves and others.

However, to conclude that a model such as the one demonstrated here, standing alone, is the solution to aiding disconnected youth, would be a shortsighted and gravely misleading error. The demonstration exposed two connected weaknesses in the Job Training Partnership Act and in the program's focus which must be corrected first:

> (1) The Job Training Partnership Act, when applied to youth, is too placement oriented. As a result, it detracts from the personal, academic, and occupational remediation which are the primary needs of low skilled, alienated youth.
>
> (2) Notwithstanding its low cost per positive termination, the average enrollmement period of 17 weeks is too short to effect lasting impact, either on a participant's trust or long term participation in the labor market.

Job placement should merely be one of the training methodologies, not necessarily an end in itself. Part-time work or try-out employment should be used as mediums to teach, test,

encourage and reward participants. As a forced outcome, used too quickly, without adequate preparation or support, job placement for this group presents a high risk of failure and even higher risks of creating further alienation.

Programs for all youth, particularly those who evidence disenfranchisement, should be encouraged and compensated for long durations of enrollment, high attendance, diverse service configurations, academic gains, competency attainments and training completions. Job placements as well as additional training and education, will naturally follow.

Programs such as the model tested here proved that these young people can be reached, but we must not fall prey to the attractive and politically expedient alternative of rapid job placement that is presented by emerging labor shortages. Having re-attracted these youth, re-ignited their interest in education and rekindled their sense of self worth, premature and adverse entry into the labor market may simply result in deeper and more intractable disaffection. Young people are too worthy of our patience and too deserving of dignity to be sacrificed in the chase for increased placement rates.

Conclusion

The demonstration succeeded in nearly every respect. A model program to reach youth unserved by current training programs was designed and demonstrated to be effective. The demonstration proved that large numbers of youth fitting the profile of social disconnection are unserved by current programs. These youth are best described as young, black, economically disadvantaged males who possess skills at or below the 8th grade level.

The demonstration proved that these youngsters can be successfully recruited, enrolled, trained, and placed with a training program that is sensitive to their needs and abilities. In particular, the open door policy, individualized instruction, and motivational activities contributed to the impressive performance figures.

The project served nearly 600 youth who may otherwise have languished on the streets -- out of school, out of work, out of luck -- and it did so in a cost-effective manner which can and should be replicated nationwide. 70001 is pleased to announce that the Private Industry Councils in both cities have provided continuation funding to support operations through June 30, 1989.

If America is to face squarely the human resource challenges of the next decade, it must realign its training priorities to serve those most in need, in particular, those youth we term disconnected. 70001 and the Labor Department have made a first hopeful step in that direction with the conclusion of the Disconnected Youth Demonstration.

About 70001 Training & Employment Institute

70001 Training & Employment Institute is the only national nonprofit organization dedicated to educating, motivating, and training youth-at-risk. The 70001 program network includes more than 70 community-based programs in 22 states which target young people who have dropped out of school or are in danger of doing so. These programs foster self-sufficiency through a simple, but effective training program, which includes remedial education, motivation, and employment preparation.

In addition to dropout prevention and recovery programs, 70001 is one of the few service-providers who also trains practitioners. 70001 works with schools, community-based organizations, and human service agencies to design training services appropriate to the needs of the organization and its clientele.

70001 is supported by a combination of public grants and contracts and private contributions at the national and local level. Through this support, 70001 has provided hope and opportunity for youth who might otherwise languish outside of the educational, economic, and social mainstream.

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